DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 031 670 AC 005 112

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Adult Education in the Art Institute of Chicago.
Pub Date Jan 69
Note-9p.
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.55
Descriptors-Adult Education Programs, *Art Education, Discussion Programs, Lecture, *Museums, Slides, Student Seminars
Identifiers-*Art Institute of Chicago

The Department of Museum Education of the Art Institute of Chicago is one of the largest in the United States; its education program is divided into two parts: for children and for adults. Among adult programs carried out regularly are free weekly public talks in the presence of an art work, lectures and discussion programs for private groups, seminars for graduate students in art history, a telephone answering service for reference questions on art, and a slide subscription series. (se)

ED031670

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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ADULT EDUCATION
in the
ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

(Revised from an article written by Barbara Wriston, Head, Museum Education for the Illinois Sesquicentennial, January, 1969)

Art museums are composed of many parts and have several functions; principally the acquisition, conservation, publication and interpretation of works of art.

In a large museum there are departments for each of the several disciplines, for example: Western European painting, Oriental art, the Decorative Arts, Prints and Drawings, as well as departments for conservation, education, and other public services.

The Art Institute of Chicago in common with most other American museums believes strongly in the role of museum education for adults and children, not only for the citizens of Chicago and the State of Illinois, but the rest of the country, and indeed the world.

It could be asserted that everything in an art museum has educational connotations. Just visiting a museum is an education to many people, or even knowing that it exists. To see the various kinds of exhibitions, both in the permanent collections and in special loan exhibitions is another form of education, as is studying installation and the manner of display.

In specific terms, however, the Department of Museum Education of the Art Institute of Chicago is one of the largest in the United States. It is made up of both professional museum personnel and carefully selected, highly

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highly trained volunteer assistants, who work exclusively with the children's program. The education program is divided into two parts, that for adults and for children. During the 1968-1969 season, about 200,000 people benefited directly from our services.

ADULT PROGRAMS

The adult audience of an institution like the Art Institute of Chicago is extremely varied. It consists of the general public, some of whom wander in from the streets seeking shelter, others seeking intellectual stimulation and others by appointment. In order to serve such a diverse group of people, we have a variety of activities, and we hope that newcomers to the museum will start their study with one of four free weekly public talks held directly in front of a work of art given from October through May, at different hours of the day and early evening to make it simple for as many people as possible to attend. Two talks are given each week from July through September for summer visitors. One difficulty is that audiences are growing so large that few galleries are big enough to hold them; there is the problem of making sure that everyone can hear the speaker and see the work of art. In addition, privacy of those who wish to view works of art by themselves is jeopardized.

To overcome these objections, we give numerous slide lectures in our various auditoriums. We have adult demonstrations by Chicago artists also. Some lectures are given twice during the week at different times, for the convenience of different sections of the public.

A somewhat indirect educational activity which works not only to help visitors, but to educate the professional members of the department are the VIP individuals or groups from all over the world, who come to the Art Institute. Many of these people are professional art historians, artists, administrators and educators from evolving countries and their ideas are well worth hearing, in addition to the information that we are able to give them.

For the past several years, the department has conducted a seminar for the graduate students of nine universities in the midwest area giving a PhD in Art History. Each university is asked to nominate a student who reads a twenty-minute paper at the Art Institute before members of his own, and other departments, the Curators of the Art Institute and the Staff of Museum Education. This gives graduate students a chance to be heard on a stage larger than that of their own universities and it is modelled on the program which has been conducted at the Frick Museum in New York, for about thirty years. Several students have received jobs as a consequence, and the Art Institute hired one of them.

Outside of the museum, members of the department, as well as other staff members of the Art Institute, often serve on juries for art exhibitions in the Chicago area. Some of the staff are painters, sculptors, or photographers, and show in combined or one-man exhibitions. and serving on the juries gives them an opportunity to see what is current in the various parts of the state.

A little known, very important educational service conducted by most of the departments in the museum is the answering of reference questions on the telephone about the program, about exhibitions at the Art Institute, in fact about almost any subject under the sun having any remote connection to art. This is a form of public relations which museums of all kinds, find very important.

Members of the department make two radio tapes each month for the Chicago Board of Education, on knowing the Art Institute. This is of course part of a series in which other museums and educational facilities in the area are involved. In addition, members of the department make frequent appearances on television and radio. Special teachers classes are encouraged; usual fees are waived, as with college and university students.

The qualifications for being a lecturer on a professional level at the Art Institute, include the ability to speak well to different kinds of groups, ranging not only in age, but in degree of education and interests, the ability to read and to speak a foreign language. Other important qualifications are the ability to use judgment in study and research, to become a good photographer, since top quality color slides are a tremendous addition to any program, not only for individual lectures, but for comparisons with the works of art in the Art Institute of Chicago.

The subjects which a successful lecturer should have in his academic background are: Art History, with preferably a speciality in some particular phase; a knowledge of our permanent collection and an interest in the special

material, even though they may have a first-class academic background. Audiences are becoming more sophisticated at one end of the scale, and less sophisticated on the other, so that a great deal of attention has to be given to the type of group with whom one is dealing. It is necessary to keep up with publications in our field, and the Ryerson and Burnham Libraries subscribe to approximately 400 periodicals yearly, all dealing with the arts. In addition, it acquires thousands of new books on fields of particular interest to our staff.

Why do people take museum education jobs instead of teaching in public or private schools where salaries are higher, the academic year shorter, and there is more job security? I think it is because they like to work with original works of art, not from slides or reproductions, and because they enjoy communicating their knowledge and pleasure to the people, old and young. who visit an art museum.

Every year various new experiments are tried. This year, in addition to the adult demonstrations, we are using art films which have definite connection with special exhibitions, or with our own collections.

Any adult interested in learning about the arts may come to any one of the free adult programs. He may also join the museum, which sends him advance notice of all educational events, and special exhibitions, and gives him an opportunity to subscribe to the various courses given on the adult level.

Depending upon the numbers of staff involved and the availability of good illustrative material, the Art Institute usually offers three subscription series each year on a fee basis. All the material is gathered by the speakers themselves. The slides are made, either by the lecturers or by our departmental photographer. To some extent the museum supports the travel as well as the research necessary in libraries in other parts of the country or the world. The staff prepares a new paperback bibliography for each of the series and a copy is given to each subscriber. The purpose of these series is first of all, to see our collections in relation to the art of the world, and secondly, to prepare travellers for journeys and to review and strengthen their impressions upon their return.

In addition, the department arranges lectures and discussions for private, social groups, either from commerce and industry, for convention groups, or from other educational organizations of many different kinds. This service is provided for a modest fee. It must always be remembered that the primary responsibility of an art museum is the care of its works of art, and for this reason, severely handicapped groups, either visually or mentally, are very seldom given an opportunity to visit the museum as a group. After all, the visually handicapped can best become aware of the visual world through words, and can achieve this as well in more private surroundings, and the severely handicapped mentally, can probably get as much from color reproductions, and a more private situation than from a large public institution.

One of the major adult programs concerns the eight Community Associate groups made up of suburban members from Highland Park, Winnetka, Fox Valley, Glen Ellyn-Wheaton, Oak Park-River Forest, the Village, Homewood-Flossmoor, and Barrington. The Art Institute of Chicago membership is the largest of any museum in the USA.

Each of these groups offers a reduced membership fee to the Art Institute, in addition to its own membership, and puts on a number of programs, not only in its own community, but arranges special visits for its members and guests, to the Art Institute. In the beginning these groups had five or six programs a year, emphasizing visits to the Art Institute. As the program developed, however, the individual groups have presented many programs themselves, with the advice and consent of the Department of Museum Education. They have done a considerable amount of work in small study groups, on seminars in preparation for special exhibitions; they have invited members of the Art Institute staff to their own communities for either an individual talk or a series of lectures. They have also supplied books for both public schools and public libraries. They have supported a travel fund for staff members of the Art Institute, and above all, have provided opportunities for the teachers of some of the suburbs to participate in special lectures at the Art Institute.

The Community Associates have provided many of our volunteer lecturers and have, in many cases, gone to graduate school, themselves, in order to prepare further for their work here. In short, these women constitute an

advance guard in the larger community around Chicago in interpreting the program for the Art Institute to a wider public. In addition to supporting programs for teachers and supplying books and slides to the public facilities in their own towns, they have provided the funds for special lectures and visits to the Art Institute for senior citizens. The programs for the teachers are designed for the teachers' stimulation, and to increase their awareness of the fine arts and to inspire interest of students at all levels. The material is not necessarily to be used in the classroom.

Although the Art Institute emphasizes the visual arts of painting, sculpture, drawings and the Decorative Arts, we also present a Members' Film Program which shows the art of the film, not art films per se. Movies are offered Thursday nights from October through May, free to members, and with a small fee for the general public.

Attendance at important loan exhibitions of which the Art Institute has eight or ten, every year, is boosted and encouraged. To make this possible a great many hours of study in the galleries, in our library and others, as well as travel, are essential for staff members.

This program is sometimes augmented by visiting speakers, either from abroad, or from the United States, who are speaking in connection with a special exhibition, or on a particular subject connected with our collections.

The department also arranges opening lectures for special exhibitions, as with the Rembrandt Tercentenary Symposium this fall. In the past this was

usually an outside speaker, but the number of Art Institute members attending openings has increased so greatly that we have been using new forms of tape recorded lectures prepared and narrated by our own staff, which can run every hour, on the hour, during the days of Members' Openings. These same lectures can be used for special groups, if necessary.

The members of the staff who work with the adult program are involved not only in a considerable amount of study, some original research, the writing of articles or book reviews for various publications, but belong to a variety of professional and learned societies, not only the American Association of Museums, the Midwest Museum Association, but other societies which impinge on their particular interest, for example, the College Art Association, the Society of Architectural Historians, the Furniture History Society, the Victorian Society, the International Committee on Museums, the International Committee on Monuments and Sites, and others. This is not only to keep them alert mentally, but to keep in touch with people in the same fields in other parts of the world. Perhaps the most difficult activity is to do research on living artists for whom biographies have not been prepared and who are not always available for interview.

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